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AUTHOR DJangi, Ahmad R.
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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the overt and covert forms of racism in American institutions of higher education and focuses on racism at one graduate school in psychology. Though the nation as a whole decries racism, overt racial acts are on the upswing at institutions of higher education and covert racism exists across the nation. The paper argues that, in the educational community, the most significant racism is covert and involves hostile and insensitive acts, bias in the application of harsh sanctions, bias in attention to students, bias in selection of curriculum materials, unequal amounts of instruction, biased attitudes toward students, lack of diversity in faculty and administration, and denial of racist actions. The central portion of the paper examines a particular graduate school of psychology publicly known for its openness and diversity. This portion cites examples of overt racism. Confronting these incidents brought to the surface existing covert racism in student treatment, hiring patterns, and community denial of racism. A final section explores and suggests solutions to address feelings, biases, and prejudices in the areas of school policies, faculty recruitment and awareness, student sensitivity, and curriculum opportunities. (Contains 14 references.) (JB)

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Racism in Higher Education: Its Presence in the Classroom and Lives of Psychology Students

Ahmad R. DJangi
Illinois School of Professional Psychology

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Abstract

The author investigates the overt and covert forms of racism that exist in America's higher education institutions today and observes their manifestations on the campus of an APA-approved graduate school in psychology. Researchers and educational authorities suggest solutions in the areas of school policy, faculty, curriculum, and student body.

Racism in Higher Education: Its Presence in the Classroom and Lives of Graduate Psychology Students

Issues of racism in America surfaced again in the spring of 1992 with the first Rodney King court decision and the subsequent Los Angeles riots. Commentators in newspapers, radio, and television agreed that the riots reflected inequities in economics, justice, and the society as a whole. The situation was much more complex than the beating of Rodney King. Such unjust beatings happen everywhere in the United States- overtly or covertly- in different forms. There were multiple factors possibly leading to the Los Angeles riots including economic disparity, underfunding for education, lack of educational growth opportunities, and lack of jobs for minorities.

Many of these issues are already part of college and university campuses. Indeed, patterns of bigotry and racism perpetuate themselves even in graduate schools of psychology. Both overt and covert forms of racism are apparent, not only in research but on a representative APA approved campus as well. Schools, especially those training psychologists, must join other forces in society to offer practical and

permanent solutions for institutional racism.

The Changing Forms of Racism

What are the forms of racism? Overt acts, openly expressing the belief that one racial group is innately superior to another, have been common in America, but decreased in frequency after the Civil Rights Act in 1964. Today, as Bibi Wein (1992) points out, "We as a nation decry racism" (p. 91), and the laws are in place to prove it. However, racial tolerance is not always the reality. Today, overt acts seem to be on the upswing in our schools, and covert racism exists across the nation.

Molnar (1989) recognizes that racism is a different kind of problem today than it was before the 1960's. Schools are now desegregated, but contact alone does not remove racism. At Cornell University, black and white students are so divided that even the most politically active cannot get together behind commonly held beliefs. In 1991, there were separate black and white groups refusing to work together, yet each urging the investment of interest in South Africa (Wein, 1992).

Lim (1992) from the U.S. Department of Education notes that in 1991 there were 3,384 reported cases of racial discrimination and harassment on college

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campuses, a 13% increase from 1990. Generally, physical attacks on minorities, racial clashes, and widespread stereotypes with racial overtones are on the rise (Molnar, 1989). Even before Rodney King, racial unrest started splitting campuses. The University of Michigan became a focal point for black awareness and sit-ins in 1988-1989, and Northern Illinois University imposed curfews after racial violence. Indeed, racism in the universities was a theme for the annual college and university presidents' conference that year.

Educators across America were asking how this could be happening with the first generation of desegregated schools. They have discovered it is not the quantity of "contact" programs, but the quality of contact that makes the difference in removing prejudice. Contact can work in removing prejudice only if it is "'...intimate, equal-status, cooperative, and sanctioned by authority'" (Grant, 1990, p. 31). Just throwing together groups and letting them live and go to school does not work.

In addition, most contact programs are based on the model of assimilation, whereby people of color are asked to accept the norms, behaviors, and characteristics of the dominant white culture (Grant,

1990). According to Northwestern professor Aldon Morris (Wein, 1992), "'What integration has meant for many whites is that blacks had to interact with them on their terms. Not only do many [whites] not want to participate in other cultures, but feel theirs in the culture'" (p. 92). Contact is not pluralistic or multicultural.

It is no wonder, then, that desegregation alone has not produced the desired results. For most of the seventies and eighties, overt acts of racism declined. Blacks and whites were shown sitting together in classrooms, playing on teams, and dancing at proms. Gone were the times of racial violence. The great advances during this period of time were legal (Civil Rights and anti-discrimination laws), though, and not psychological (individual changes in racist thinking) (Molnar, 1989). Policies were in place, but practices were superficial. Kinder and Sears concluded racism was taking a new form, that of "abstract, moralistic resentment" (Grant, 1990, p. 28), moving them to even coin the phrase "symbolic racism" (Sniderman and Tetlock, 1986).

A close look at the figures reflect what was happening. Schaefer (1990) tracks the black college figures showing that in 1976, 52% of African-Americans

in college were attending black private institutions. When racial restrictions ended and affirmative action was in place, major universities and colleges recruited African-Americans and reduced the number in black colleges to 16% in 1988. However, the majority of colleges and universities were still less than 2% black. Indeed, U.S. colleges enrolled fewer African-American undergraduates in 1985 than in 1960 (Molnar, 1989), and African-Americans at the graduate level have also declined (Schaefer, 1990). As a result, there are fewer African Americans to fill administrative and faculty positions today.

Affirmative Action created its own problems. Scholarships were offered to minorities and active recruitment was done. Consequently, whites resented African-Americans for taking their positions. The African-Americans were also disappointed. Many felt demeaned by the preferential- as opposed to equal-treatment, and others were "...denied pride in their accomplishments because even though special treatment played no role in their success, people assumed it was a crucial factor" (Wein, 1992, p. 92).

Educational Racism

It is such covert racism that pervades today. As Stover (1990) notes, "most educators are not

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consciously racist" (p. 16); yet prejudices can be reflected in many subtle ways. Murray and Clark (1990), identify eight ways racism shows up in schools: (a) hostile and insensitive acts, (b) bias in the use of harsh sanctions, (c) bias in giving attention to the students, (d) bias in selection of curriculum materials, (e) inequality in the amount of instruction, (f) bias in attitudes toward students, (g) failure to hire racial minority teachers and other school personnel at all levels, and (h) denial of racist actions. Namely, insensitive students, biased teachers, skewed textbooks, tracking in the public schools, and the psychological roots of prejudice that lie in us all have led to the rise of covert racism in educational settings.

The figures reflect the results. African-American males are vanishing on college campuses. Indeed, 80 out of 1000 African-Americans attend universities, as compared to 825/1000 whites (Schaefer, 1990). The figures are worse for other groups. Five out of 1,000 Indians go on to higher education (Schaefer, 1990) and 17 out of 1000 Hispanics (Kavanaugh, 1991). Although the Asian community has higher numbers going to college than the other groups (whites included), their particular form

of racial victimization lies in the increased performance expectations laid upon them by the educational system. This is the result of the cultural bias that "all Asians" are intelligent and proficient in math and science. Such stereotyping has one curious side-effect in that Asian students are often played against their black counterparts by teachers, thus leading to racial tensions between African-Americans and Asians (Stover, 1990). In the pluralistic society today, white-black confrontation often monopolizes racism discussions hiding the racism that exists internally in groups- dark-skinned blacks against light-skinned, Puerto Rican (Hispanics) versus Mexican-American (Hispanics), etc.

The racism seen in the schools is naturally a reflection of the racism in society. Attitudinal and institutional racism are intricately related since each depends upon the other for sustenance. The individual racist must have an institutional framework for his behavior (Jones, 1974). The significant economic and demographic changes that are prevalent in the United States today have exacerbated racial tensions (Stover, 1990).

One Graduate School Example

One APA approved graduate school of psychology in

the Midwest is no exception to these scenarios and figures. On the surface, the institution proclaims a commitment to student diversity and in 1991 and 1992 received awards for this open-minded dedication. It professes a need to educate its students to diversity and create a cultural awareness in them (Academic Catalogue, 1991). The school's financial aid program includes minority student grants and a memorial scholarship for minority, foreign, and/or disadvantaged students. Minority students have a voice through the Racial/Ethnic Committee, can join a racial support group, and are featured in their own directory. There are three one-hour credit courses and one three-hour course dealing with diverse populations. As with many higher education institutions across the United States, the school presents a racially concerned and sensitive picture. With its average student aged 26 in the Master's Program and 32 in the doctoral program (Academic Catalogue, 1991, p. 11), the campus would seem mature.

Yet, overt racism manifested itself in the spring of 1992 at the annual extended group week-end retreat. Two white male students engaged in racial slurs and a betrayal of group confidentiality with an African-American colleague. They failed to participate in the

cultural diversity workshop and after the week-end found cohorts among other white students to start a white support group in response to the already established minority one.

This incident brought to the surface the covert racism which has existed on the campus for some time. Of Murray and Clark's (1990) eight ways racism shows up in schools, the school has displayed six. Obviously, the week-end example above shows the insensitive and hostile acts of certain students toward minorities. Students in the Cultural Treatment Issues course are often disrespectful, rude, and insensitive to the African-American instructor and the minority teaching assistants. Often, this same insensitivity is apparent in their interviews with minority clients or their reactions to a cultural experience.

Teachers have been known to give more attention to their white students in class, seeming to favor these students' ideas and their participation. The same paper could be written by a white student and receive an A, and resubmitted by a minority student and receive a lower grade. The foreign students will often receive remarks on their use of language; such a comment is often warranted. However, it becomes

racist when some professors will remark on a minority student's reports, "He needs writing help," while other instructors will laud his writing abilities.

Curriculum materials by and far are biased for the white culture. Of course, much of psychology has been recognized as Eurocentric by multicultural researchers, and thus many textbooks are culturally skewed. When students ask professors about a different world view, they are often told that, "This is beyond the scope of this course."

The bias teachers show in class can be obvious. In the 1990 spring term, one professor gave an open-book mid-term exam in class. Students were allowed to leave the room for a break if they needed to take one. A white student went to the washroom. When an African-American female left to do the same, also carrying her test with her for security's sake, the teaching assistant accused her of trying to cheat and then be resistive of his directions., The student, recognizing the racial overtones, dropped the class and planned to take it with another professor in the fall.

There has been a failure to hire racial minority teachers. Fourteen percent of the core faculty is ethnic minority (Academic Catalogue, 1991). True, the

availability might be limited, but the school makes no attempts to adopt an aggressive hiring stance.

Overall, there is a denial of racist actions. The Student Senate paid for a student to attend the National Conference on Student Diversity and yet did not cooperate in scheduling a time for feedback to the campus, nor did the Senate even show an interest in hearing the conference results. When a forum time was scheduled, it was not advertised and only 13 students showed up. Recently, the President decided the memorial scholarship should be open for any student to apply; that it should not be only for minority students. None of these actions were seen as racist.

The covert racism shows up among the students as well. Walking into the student lounge, one sees the distinct ethnic/racial groups. Those whites sitting with the racial/ethnic groups are often those whites who have supported minority faculty and therefore are somewhat ostracized by the other white students. Schofield (as cited in Stover, 1990) notes failure to break down social barriers can lead to more serious misconceptions and stereotypes. Often, misconceptions exacerbate racial fears and lead to split and hostile racial cliques among school students. At this stage, an African-American student bumping accidentally into

a white student is perceived as aggressive, and the act as racially motivated.

In a similar manner, at a recent common hour at the graduate school, an African-American female openly expressed her feelings about racism. Later, several white students told a teaching assistant that this particular student was aggressive and uncaring. In contrast, at the same meeting, a Caucasian male student angrily talked about his feelings about racism, even resorting to profanity. Yet, he was not perceived by the others as being aggressive, but as "upset."

Solutions

That covert racism has always existed on the campuses is a given fact considering the racial history of the United States over the last 100 years. America might have successfully "capped the well", but now we as a society must attend to curing the source- the underlying feelings, biases, and prejudices that are not denied in our everyday living. It is especially important for graduate schools, particularly those in the human service fields, to do this, as they are training the psychologists and educators for tomorrow's American society- by all indicators, a pluralistic society where by 2010 no one

ethnic or racial group will be the majority (Grant, 1990). Schools must ask themselves some pertinent questions. Are faculty members trained to help students accept other races and cultures? Does the institution adequately train students to live in a pluralistic society? Do the administration and faculty recognize the racial tension in the school? The solutions seem to lie in four categories: school policies, faculty recruitment and awareness, student sensitivity, and curriculum opportunities.

School policies for minority help are in place superficially at most schools. There are scholarships and programs. However, are they in practice? Graduate costs are expensive and for many minority students, prohibitive. At the midwestern graduate school, the one scholarship specifically for minorities has now been "opened up" for any student. What is left for the minority student are grants and loans. As Shom and Spooner (1991) point out, many minority students (usually poorer than whites) are leery of loans, and the "prospect of indebting themselves...tends to make college attendance an unattractive option" (p. 188). Minority scholarships are the preferred option.

Schools also need to create a positive

environment for the minority students they do have. In the 1990 study by Gipson, Weathers, and Coston, the greatest difference between minority and white students was the minority's feeling, "'I have to be prepared to deal with a threatening environment'" (p. 168). Covert racism, not just overt, can create such an environment. At the midwestern graduate school, the Probation Committee generally acts within one week on academic cases, but one month after the incident, it still had not reached a decision dealing with the racial and authority confrontation case from the extended group week-end. Such inequities send clear racist signals to minority students.

Furthermore, where can students go when they sense unfair or biased treatment from a staff member? There often is no support for students with accusations such as these. In most colleges, the advisor is generally there just to advise the student on courses. When an unfair grade or remark occurs, the student cannot find support from the system. The faculty will more likely support a colleague when he or she is criticized by a student for biased treatment. As Stover (1990) notes, schools must "adopt a firm policy of zero tolerance for racism in any form" (p. 17). Penalties, "teachable moments", and

a clear stance from the administration are all part of the solution.

Educational institutions must address these issues. Scholarships must be made available for minority students. The administration should be sensitive to its handling of minority students and their issues, and an ethnic/racial committee might be expanded to be a forum for students who need to articulate concerns. The administration could empower such a committee to make decisions fairly so faculty and students could feel comfortable about decisions made. Policies should be firmly in place.

The faculty- through recruitment and awareness- is a key to setting a racially tolerant tone for a campus. Murray and Clark (1990) cite the need for affirmative action policies and procedures resulting in an ethnically diverse staff. Presently, the only ethnic minorities in the midwestern graduate school's core faculty are three African-Americans and one Puerto Rican. Though the role model issues- so important for undergraduate schools- is not as pressing for graduate schools, an all-white faculty does offer only white role models and a picture of psychology as a whole being white therapists and white (Eurocentric) theory and practice.

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More importantly, is the white faculty aware of cultural issues? Many researchers believe this to be the key concern (Grant, 1990; Murray & Clark, 1990; Shom & Spooner, 1991; Stover, 1990). The psychological roots of prejudice lie in us all (Wein, 1992), and it is these that lead to covert racism. There must be in-service opportunities for teachers and administrators.

Recently, one of the graduate school's faculty members approached the student who had run the multicultural workshop at the extended group week-end and who had been the school's representative at the National Conference for the Advancement of Student Diversity. She asked him to meet with her as she wanted to be made more aware of cultural issues. The school itself should take this responsibility for its staff. Northern Illinois University responded to its racial tensions by running a workshop for its staff and faculty on "unlearning" racism. Those attending valued it as a positive learning experience that in turn would affect their attitudes and their teaching (Henley & Arnold, 1990). As Wein (1992) notes, "When we learn to recognize our own biases, we have made a powerful beginning" (p. 95).

Once the faculty can be made aware of its own attitudes, one area they and the administration can

address is the curriculum. At the midwestern graduate school, four courses currently offered send clear "unintended messages" (Stover, 1990) in their titles. There is a touch of white superiority when we hear "Family Therapy with Special Populations". The term "special populations" offers a connotative deficit interpretation: "special" is not "normal".

Though the bulk of courses deal with issues in therapy, only one touches on the therapist's biases and racism. That course has been a hotly contended one, with students having great difficulty with it, resulting in grievances filed with the administration. These reactions offer sure proof that more needs to be done to address this problem. Perhaps APA approved schools should offer two courses- beginning and advanced- so that this deeply rooted issue can be more tenderly addressed.

Certainly courses in racial and ethnic awareness should be prerequisites for practicums. These prejudices must be dealt with before the student begins any practice. One culturally aware student was appalled when she received a diagnostic case to review which showed a blatant disregard for racial issues. Two years after an initial diagnostic work-up, a teen-aged girl was still in deep problems at school and a

reassessment was requested. The original white psychologist on the case had recommended no special education services for the girl who- he felt- had normal abilities. Yet, he failed to mention or take into consideration that the girl was black, had just been adopted by a white family, and was now living in a middle class white suburb, attending a white junior high school. The problems had accelerated to a dysfunctional point two years later when she was again referred. Graduate schools in professional psychology must make curriculum adjustments and advancements so that their students do not repeat these covertly racist kinds of service.

Also, schools can help their students become more culturally aware. As Allport noted, "'Contacts that bring knowledge and acquaintance are likely to engender sounder beliefs concerning minority groups, and for this reason contribute to the reduction of prejudice'" (as cited in Grant, 1990, p. 30). There must be meaningful interaction between the students on campus. This can be accomplished through social groups or required common hour forums which can expand social contacts between racial groups. Workshops such as the one offered by the graduate school's extended group week-end should be available for the entire

student body.

Faculty can help by offering interactive instructional methods (Stover, 1990) and by having more opportunities for cooperative learning. As Grant (1990) notes, cooperative groups help diminish racism especially if cross-racial relations are encouraged, the racial composition is fairly balanced, and the minority group can be initially superior in the task.

Can the minority students ever be superior? Tying back to Morris' remark (Wein, 1992) that integration commonly means assimilating into the white culture, higher educational institutions have to become aware of the cultural demands of their minority students. As Shom and Spooner (1991) note, minority students often need increased academic support. Foreign students might not have received writing training in their countries. Faced with many writing assignments following a variety of formats, the foreign student might be inept in expressing ideas and communicating to his/her professors that he/she does understand and can apply the obtained knowledge. Graduate schools might do well to require an entry level skills course for all their students, as even the majority ones come from varied educational and personal backgrounds. Such remediation courses are

becoming crucial for higher education faced with a pluralistic population (Shom & Spooner, 1991).

The screening process for applicants is also important. Many graduate psychology schools have already committed themselves to accepting minority students. Have they also set criteria for not accepting racist students? Seeing as these schools' main purpose is to train psychologists and not to handle students' personal issues and problems, they cannot afford to accept people whose prejudices, biases, and racism would cripple their future work as clinicians. The curriculum cannot- nor should it- be adjusted to correct this problem. Instead, proper screening criteria is the solution.

Finally, minority students are often "first generation" college attenders (Shom & Spooner, 1991). Because of this, they might "not have adequate familial and peer-group support" (Shom & Spooner, 1991, p. 188). In the absence of a supportive environment and in the presence of financial difficulties, they need support programs from the school. These can include student support groups or counseling/advising situations.

Conclusion

Preventing and eliminating racism involves more

than just having minority support groups, teaching a few one-hour courses on diversity, or scheduling a three hour workshop on racism. Schools need to deal with the core root of racism and become aware of the covert racism that exists in the institution, the faculty, the curriculum, and the students. Racism exists today- covertly and overtly- despite the laws which have come about to control it. Even graduate campuses with educated populations encounter racism in both forms.

Yet, there are solutions that can be actuated. These may not address the problems fully, but any step can only be in the right direction. As Murray and Clark (1990) write: "Such initiatives offer promise for opening up avenues of equity and tolerance and breaking the ingrained patterns of racism that currently victimize many students and keep them from achieving their full potential" (p. 24). Faced with a multicultural American society in the near future, we must act now.

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